

# WORKERS WORLD

Workers and oppressed peoples of the world unite!

May 21, 2009

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50¢

# Pro-union bill under attack

## Fight to save Employee Free Choice Act!

By Fred Goldstein

The economic crisis continued to batter the working class in April with an official job loss of 611,000. This brings the total number of jobs lost since December 2007 to 5.7 million.

Unemployment is at 8.9 percent and is expected to continue climbing with no end in sight. Total unemployment, however—which includes another 8.9 million workers forced into part-time work and those who have given up looking for a job—rose to 15.8 percent, or more than 25 million.

More than a quarter of the unemployed have been out of work for more than six months, the highest rate since 1948 when the government first started keeping track.

The U.S. government does not publish statistics on how many union jobs have been lost in this crisis, but at a minimum it is many hundreds of thousands. The toll this is taking on all the unions—from manufacturing to services, from steel workers to hotel workers—makes the effort to pass the Employee Free Choice Act now pending in Congress all the more urgent.

### Workers need EFCA

The bosses are using the crisis to lower wages, shorten hours, reduce or take away benefits and worsen working conditions. Workers everywhere are made to swallow concessions out of fear of losing their jobs and having to compete against masses of other jobless workers.

Where there is no union, the bosses are all-powerful. For the unorganized workers, from Wal-Mart to Starbucks to Home Depot, their only defense in this crisis of mass unemployment is to have a union.

The bosses know this. That is why they are waging an all-out campaign to destroy the central provision of EFCA—the card check system—which allows workers to form a union when a majority sign union cards.

Right now the boss can demand a National Labor Relations Board supervised election before allowing a union in. The election process is dominated by the employers. Companies engage in spying, intimidation, forced anti-union meetings on company time, illegal firings, and threats to close down while the union is completely restricted. And if the workers manage to get organized into a union, the companies drag out the bargaining process so that the chance of getting a contract signed is minimal.

EFCA was designed to limit the bosses' advantage and give the workers and the unions a greater chance. The bill is a vital piece of legislation that has the potential to assist the entire working class. The bill alone is no substitute for the class struggle, but its passage could serve to stimulate that struggle from down below on many new fronts, and this is what has the bosses running scared.

Studies show that 50 million workers in the U.S. who don't have a union would

join one if they had a chance. EFCA could provide a legal basis for broadening the struggle for union representation on a wide scale.

### Potential for union organizing

Shortening the legal road to union recognition and weakening the employer-dominated NLRB election process could encourage militant activists inside and outside the labor movement to organize in areas that had been thought unwinnable.

The passage of EFCA could even open up challenges to the right-to-work laws of 22 states in the South and Southwest. It could form the legal basis for challenges when the bargaining rights of workers in the public sector are outlawed.

Federal legislation encouraging and removing legal obstacles to the formation of unions could be used as a basis to challenge all state laws that contravene federal legislative intent with respect to union organizing.

The capitalist class knows this and is going all out to stop this bill in its tracks. Despite all the hundreds of millions of dollars given to the Obama campaign and the Democratic Party by the AFL-CIO and Change to Win, the pressure of the bosses has endangered passage of the essential features of EFCA.

This danger must be met by mass mobilization of labor and the commu-

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## May Day in Cuba: 'Long live socialism!'

Above, hundreds of thousands of Cuban workers and youth march in Havana May 1st. May Day marches took place in every province, including Santiago, where 200,000 marched. See page 9.



# Gov’t attacks Katrina survivors’ housing

By David Hoskins

In the midst of a national housing crisis, the Federal Emergency Management Agency has announced the eviction of all Hurricane Katrina survivors from the government trailers they have been living in since they were left homeless following the 2005 disaster. FEMA officials plan to repossess and sell for scrap metal the 4,600 trailers remaining in Mississippi and Louisiana by May 30.

FEMA’s actions amount to an attack on the same overwhelmingly Black Katrina survivors whom the agency failed to protect from the natural disaster. Racism and the ineptitude of the capitalist state have helped create the most flawed emergency housing program in the agency’s history.

The program has provided inadequate housing for overwhelming numbers of survivors. According to testing by the Sierra Club, as many as 120,000 displaced Gulf Coast families were initially placed in trailers with formaldehyde levels more than three times the accepted level. FEMA discontinued use of these toxic trailers only after a grassroots struggle generated mass public and congressional pressure.

Incompetence only explains a portion of the heartache doled out to those left homeless in Katrina’s wake. Federal law is designed to force disaster survivors into destitution by prohibiting FEMA from providing emergency housing for longer than 18 months.

Survivors have been able to remain in their trailers as long as they have only because widespread discontent forced officials to extend the deadline. If FEMA has its way this time, the number of homeless will swell alarmingly in the region.

Housing advocates have criticized the eviction of so many poor, elderly and ill occupants from the small, substandard trailers. Double amputees, diabetics, the

mentally ill and patients dependent on oxygen tanks are among those threatened with eviction.

FEMA spokesperson Clark Stevens has callously disregarded such concerns by insisting that the government trailers were only ever intended as a temporary arrangement. Stevens’ remarks ignore the economic facts on the ground. Fifty-three percent of Mississippi FEMA trailer residents make less than \$20,000 a year, according to research by the Governor’s Office.

According to the Los Angeles Times, a Louisiana state program ostensibly designed to build small, permanent Katrina cottages with millions of dollars in federal aid has failed to produce a single unit. The New Orleans Times-Picayune reported that another \$869 million federally funded program to fix more than 18,000 damaged rental units has produced fewer than 1,200 repaired apartments ready for new tenants.

The little rebuilding money that has been disbursed to trailer residents was insufficient to cover the cost of repairs for homes for two-thirds of Louisiana survivors, according to the nonprofit PolicyLink.

FEMA’s actions come during a severe capitalist economic crisis that has resulted in record home foreclosures.

The National Coalition for the Homeless reported in December 2008 that 12 major cities experienced an increase in homelessness as a result of foreclosures, with renters of foreclosed properties being the victims most vulnerable to homelessness.

Affordable housing is already scarce in the Gulf Coast. The FEMA evictions threaten to exacerbate the local housing crisis, as Katrina survivors are made to compete in the search to secure affordable housing with renters forced out of foreclosed properties. Many survivors have already purchased tents in anticipation of the day they are forced by FEMA from the tiny trailers they call home. □

# The Angola Three: torture in our own backyard

*The following excerpt was written by Hans Bennett, an independent multimedia journalist (www.insubordination.blogspot.com) and co-founder of Journalists for Mumia Abu-Jamal (www.abu-jamal-news.com). The article can be read in its entirety at alternet.org.*

“My soul cries from all that I witnessed and endured. It does more than cry, it mourns continuously,” said Black Panther Robert Hillary King, following his release from the infamous Louisiana State Penitentiary at Angola in 2001, after serving his last 29 years in continuous solitary confinement. King argues that slavery persists in Angola and other U.S. prisons, citing the 13th Amendment to the U.S. Constitution, which legalizes slavery in prisons as “a punishment for crime whereof the party shall have been duly convicted.” King says: “You can be legally incarcerated but morally innocent.”

Robert King, Albert Woodfox and Herman Wallace are known as the “Angola Three,” a trio of political prisoners whose supporters include Amnesty International, Archbishop Desmond Tutu, Congressman John Conyers and the ACLU. Kgalema Motlante, the President of South Africa, says their case “has the potential of laying

bare, exposing the shortcomings, in the entire U.S. system.” Woodfox and Wallace are the two co-founders of the Angola chapter of the Black Panther Party—the only official prison chapter of the BPP. Both convicted in the highly contested stabbing death of white prison guard Brent Miller, Woodfox and Wallace have now spent over 36 years in solitary confinement.

The joint federal civil rights lawsuit of King, Woodfox, and Wallace, alleging that their time in solitary confinement is “cruel and unusual punishment,” will go to trial any month in Baton Rouge at the U.S. Middle District Court. Herman Wallace’s appeal against his murder conviction is currently pending in the Louisiana Supreme Court, and on March 18, he was transferred to the Hunt Correctional Facility in St. Gabrielo, Louisiana, where he remains in solitary confinement. On March 2, the U.S. Fifth Circuit Court heard oral arguments regarding Albert Woodfox’s conviction, after the Louisiana Attorney General appealed a lower court’s ruling that overturned the conviction.

An 18,000-acre former slave plantation in rural Louisiana, Angola is the largest prison in the U.S. Today,

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## Harlem street meeting says,

By Monica Moorehead  
Harlem, N.Y.

The struggle to free death-row political prisoner Mumia Abu-Jamal is heating up in New York City. On May 8, an emergency, militant street meeting took place in front of Harlem's Adam Clayton Powell Jr. State Office Building to demand that elected officials call upon U.S. Attorney General Eric Holder and the Justice Department to conduct a civil rights investigation into constitutional rights violations against Mumia. Congressperson Charles Rangel, who represents the Harlem community, has come out in support of the call for the investigation.

Mumia, a former Black Panther and an award-winning journalist, was arrested in December 1981 for the shooting death of a white police officer, Daniel Faulkner, in Philadelphia. Mumia has maintained his innocence for almost 27 years following a sham of a trial in which he was convicted. He is facing the possibility of lethal injection or life in prison without parole. The U.S. Supreme Court recently refused to review one of Mumia's legal petitions that exposed the racist exclusion of Black jurors during the original trial.

Orrie Lumumba, a MOVE supporter, chaired the street meeting called by the New York Free Mumia Abu-Jamal Coalition. Speaker after speaker linked the campaign to free Mumia with broader political and economic issues, such as the prison industrial complex, gentrification, police brutality, foreclosures, health care, racism, Palestine and Somalia. A number of talks raised the case of Troy Davis, another Black man being threatened with execution in Georgia.



Larry Hales, Pam Africa and Rev. Luis Barrios, below, who spoke about Mumia's new book "Jailhouse Lawyers: Prisoners Defending Prisoners vs. the U.S.A."

Speakers included City Councilperson Charles Barron; Rev. Luis Barrios, who was recently released from a New York prison following his arrest at a protest of the repressive Western Hemisphere Institute for Security Cooperation in Georgia; Esperanza Martell, long-time fighter for the freedom of Puerto Rican political prisoners; Nellie Bailey, Harlem Tenants Council; Laura Whitehorn and Lawrence Hayes, former political prisoners; Larry Hales, Fight Imperialism, Stand Together and the International Action Center; Omowale Clay, December 12th Movement; Suzanne Ross and Sundiata Sadiq, N.Y. Free Mumia Coalition; Nada Khader, Westchester Peace Action Coalition; and Pam Af-



WW PHOTOS: LAL ROOHEK

rica, International Concerned Family and Friends of Mumia Abu-Jamal.

The street meeting attracted many Harlem residents. Copies of Mumia's new book, "Jailhouse Lawyers," were sold during the talks. Visit [www.iacenter.org](http://www.iacenter.org) to sign the petition in support of the civil rights investigation. □

By Mumia Abu-Jamal on death row

## 'A party of one'



From an April 30 audio column at [www.prisonradio.org](http://www.prisonradio.org). Go to [www.millions4mumia.org](http://www.millions4mumia.org) to read updates on Mumia's case.

That great observer of American democracy, Alexis de Tocqueville, noted that U.S. political parties were like nations at war with one another.

While that's certainly true when it comes to the average rank-and-file party members, who work, sweat, bite and fight against political opponents for ascendancy, the same cannot be said of those at the highest levels.

That is but one lesson to emerge from the abrupt party-shift of U.S. Sen. Arlen Specter, who, up until quite recently was the senior Republican senator from Pennsylvania and among the institution's longest-serving.

Facing an increasingly difficult primary election in the fall, Specter ditched the party on which he has run and won for almost 30 years, and cast his lot with the opposing majority Democratic Party.

Political pundits and talking heads went almost apoplectic in their overheated responses and predictions. "Earth-shattering!" said one. "An earthquake!" said another. In moments, they counted his votes on Democratic bills and proposals that had yet to be written.

The truth was quite simple: he wanted to win re-election, and he couldn't do it in the GOP.

It's often been said that the Senate is a millionaire's club; but it's more. It's one of the most exclusive clubs on earth. It's only 100 men and women, who are essentially princes and princesses of power.

In each U.S. state only two people can sit in the Senate, and once in, it's quite difficult to lose an election. Because Specter had an irritating independence streak, his upcoming Republican primary would have been among those seen as unsure.

Richard J. Needham, columnist for the Canadian Globe and Mail, said, "Power is a drug on which the politicians are hooked."

Power—that's it. Specter, who has spent his adult life as a prince, didn't feel like giving up that incredible power. And his switch virtually insures that he won't have to.

By switching parties he gives the Democrats one vote closer to a bulletproof majority—the 60 votes with which they can virtually run the table (assuming former comedian Al Franken can hold his lead over the GOP's Norman Coleman).

By so doing, Specter virtually insures that his former party-mates will be powerless, as without 41 votes, they can't stage a filibuster—or effectively block any legislation.

He therefore becomes the most powerful member of that body, for his vote becomes crucial.

The great wit, Alexander Pope, said, "Party-spirit ... which at best is but the madness of many for the gain of the few."

Arlen Specter is a Party unto himself.

Mumia's book, "Jailhouse Lawyers," and the movie, "In Prison My Whole Life," available at [www.Leftbooks.com](http://www.Leftbooks.com).

## Global day of action

# Stop the execution of Troy Davis

On May 19, from Alaska to West Virginia and from Argentina to Uganda, high school and college students, faith-based groups and progressive community organizations are organizing vigils, rallies and petition drives as well as the vital means of communication to bring worldwide pressure on Georgia Gov. Sonny Perdue and the Pardons and Parole Board to stop the execution of Troy Anthony Davis.

Davis was convicted as a teenager of the 1991 killing of an off-duty Savannah policeman, solely on the basis of inconsistent eyewitness testimony, and sentenced to death.

Despite recantations by seven of the nine trial witnesses and the exculpatory statements of additional witnesses pointing to another man as the shooter, U.S. courts have refused to allow Davis a hearing to present the new evidence. Many of the witnesses cite police intimidation and threats as the reason for their false statements at the highly-charged trial.

Without those tainted testimonies and lacking any physical evidence at all linking Davis to the murder, the prosecution's case would have consisted of two witnesses—the man now alleged to have committed the killing and a member of the U.S. military who on the night of the incident told police he was unable to identify the shooter. Yet two years later in court, he pointed to Troy Davis.

Davis has always maintained his innocence.

Hundreds of thousands of people in the U.S. and around the world are outraged by the obvious injustices of this case. Davis has twice come within days and even

hours of being executed when in the midst of grassroots mobilization, state and federal authorities have intervened.

On April 16, the 11th Circuit Court of Appeals ruled 2-1 against Davis' appeal, essentially denying possible innocence as a sufficient reason to overturn the trial verdict.

While Davis' lawyers mount an appeal to the U.S. Supreme Court, which has previously failed to hear his case, organiza-

tions such as Georgians for an Alternative to the Death Penalty, Amnesty International and the NAACP are calling on



An international mobilization is underway to fight the racist death penalty and save Troy Davis, an innocence man. Look for local actions or call your own.

GLOBAL DAY OF ACTION FOR



TROY  
DAVIS

TUESDAY, MAY 19, 2009  
6-8PM STATE CAPITOL STEPS

206 WASHINGTON ST SW, ATLANTA

NO PHYSICAL EVIDENCE. NO MURDER WEAPON.  
ANOTHER MAN IMPLICATED.

NO COURT WILLING TO HEAR THE NEW EVIDENCE.  
EXECUTION DATE COULD BE SET SOON!



Please sign the petition:  
[www.amnestyusa.org/troydavis](http://www.amnestyusa.org/troydavis)  
For more info:  
404-876-5661 ext. 13 troy@aiusa.org





## Rev. Pinkney case

# Activists seek to overturn racist conviction

By Abayomi Azikiwe  
Editor, Pan-African News Wire

On June 9 the Michigan Court of Appeals will hear defense arguments in the case of Rev. Edward Pinkney, leader of the Benton Harbor Black Autonomy Network of Community Organizers (BANCO). Pinkney was convicted by an all-white Berrien County jury in March 2007 on trumped-up charges related to false allegations of voter fraud.

The American Civil Liberties Union of Michigan has taken Pinkney's case, and was successful in winning his release on bond in December 2008 pending the outcome of the appeal. Pinkney was convicted of four felony counts and one misdemeanor after winning a successful recall campaign against a City Commissioner.

As a result of the recall, the courts in Berrien County overturned the election results citing irregularities. The first trial against Pinkney ended in a hung jury in 2006. The charges were reinstated, leading to Pinkney's conviction and subsequent house arrest. He was initially sentenced to one year in jail and four years probation by Berrien County Judge Alfred Butzbaugh.

Pinkney was placed on a tether and not allowed to step outside his home. His phone calls were monitored, and he was prohibited from engaging in community or church activities in Berrien County.

After Pinkney published an article in the Chicago-based People's Tribune newspaper criticizing Butzbaugh's actions in his case and citing scripture from Deuteronomy 28:14-22, the pastor was hauled into another Berrien County courtroom in December 2007. He was charged with threatening the life of the trial judge and sentenced to 3 to 10 years in state prison.

Over the next year Pinkney was transferred to more than six correctional facilities throughout the state. A nationwide

campaign in his defense drew worldwide attention to the pastor's plight as a political prisoner. Even though Pinkney was released on appeal on Dec. 24, 2008, his conditions of probation are draconian.

Pinkney's bond hearing was held in the same Berrien County court system that imposed the railroad. Under his appeal bond he is denied the right to preach, grant interviews, write articles, address crowds or engage in politics.

### Support builds for appeals hearing

In March three friend-of-the-court briefs were filed in support of overturning the conviction of Rev. Pinkney. A broad-based group of religious organizations, law professors and free speech advocates submitted the legal documents.

"We are thrilled with the overwhelming support from the religious community, constitutional scholars and free speech organizations," said Michael J. Steinberg, the ACLU of Michigan legal director. "The groups persuasively argue for the fundamental American principle that a preacher cannot be thrown in prison for his religious speech even if some find it offensive." (aclumich.org, March 18)

The religious freedom brief encompasses the views of numerous faith-based organizations including the National Association of Evangelicals, the American Jewish Congress, the Christian Legal Society, the Baptist Joint Committee for Religious Liberty, the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church and the National Baptist Convention, among others.

Another brief was submitted by 18 law professors from various universities including Wayne State University Law School, University of Detroit Law School and the Thomas M. Cooley Law School. The brief states that "In this country, under this Constitution, and on this Court's watch, [Rev. Pinkney] must not be im-

prisoned for speaking his conscience."

Also, the Thomas Jefferson Center for the Protection of Free Expression argued in its brief: "In finding that Rev. Pinkney's newspaper editorial violated his conditions of probation, the lower court punished speech at the core of First Amendment protection: public criticism of the judiciary."

In the upcoming appeals hearing in Grand Rapids, Rev. Pinkney will be represented by attorneys Michael J. Steinberg of the ACLU as well as James J. Walsh and Rebecca O'Reilly of the corporate law firm Bodman LLP.

### Berrien County & U.S. apartheid

Berrien County in southwest Michigan is a stark representative of racism and national oppression. Benton Harbor, which is over 90 percent African American, is one of the most underdeveloped cities in the state. In neighboring St. Joseph, a nearly all-white city, the standard of living is much higher and it is the seat of the county where the court is located.

Over the last several years a so-called development project, Harbor Shores, has unveiled plans to take control of large sections of Benton Harbor to construct a golf course and residential enclave for the wealthy. These plans, along with an astronomical foreclosure and unemployment rates, are forcing many residents of Benton Harbor to leave the area.

According to an article published by Dorothy Pinkney, spouse of the persecuted minister, presiding trial judge Butzbaugh has interests in the Harbor Shores development project. The Whirlpool Corporation, which is highly influential in the region, is the major promoter of the Harbor Shores scheme.

"My husband was denied due process and the right under state law to an impartial decision maker because the trial judge, Alfred Butzbaugh, had a financial



WWW PHOTO: ABAYOMI AZIKIWE

Rev. Pinkney

interest in the development of Harbor Shores. This huge development project is what motivated my husband to seek the recall of the corrupt Benton Harbor city commissioner Glen Yarbrough," Dorothy Pinkney wrote. (BANCO website, April 2009)

She continues: "The trial court financial interest in the Harbor Shores project was not known to my husband until after the trial. The Harbor Shores project which has been primarily pressed by Cornerstone Alliance on behalf of Whirlpool Corporation began in 1998 when the community economic development corporation was formed by John Dewane of the law firm Butzbaugh and Ryan."

The Michigan Emergency Committee Against War and Injustice, the Michigan Welfare Rights Organization and the Michigan Coalition for Human Rights are mobilizing people to attend the appeals hearing for Rev. Pinkney on June 9. The hearing will take place in Grand Rapids at the Court of Appeals Building at 350 Ottawa Street beginning at 9 a.m. For information on transportation, please call MECAWI at 313-680-5508. □

## After noose-hanging incident

# Campaign to dismiss racist fire captain

In Houston in April a Black firefighter saw a noose in the locker room at Fire Station No. 41, where he worked, and reported it to his supervisor. A white captain had hung it at his locker.

Despite pleas to the mayor for an investigation, nothing has been done to the fire captain except being given a letter of reprimand. But the Black firefighter who reported this racist act was disciplined and also given a letter of reprimand. Activists held a May 7 press conference at the S.H.A.P.E. Community Center in Houston's Black community to show solidarity with the Black firefighter.

Retired African-American firefighter Alvin James said that because of the undercurrents of racism in the Houston Fire Department, Black men and women are afraid to speak out about racism. "I have gone to City Hall and the mayor has said he would investigate this, but nothing has been done," said James.

Activist Deric Muhammad, a leader of the Houston Millions More Movement, told local media on May 7 that a noose is a clear symbol of racism, an insult to every Black person, and must not be tolerated by those working for the city and for the public.

"The City of Houston should have a zero-tolerance policy for racism," Deloyd Parker, the executive direc-

tor of the S.H.A.P.E. Community Center, told the media. "We demand that the white captain be removed from his job."

Activist and attorney Sister Sadiyah Evangelista explained to the press that Mr. Bennet, the Black firefighter who found the noose at Station No. 41 and reported it, has been disciplined. "Yet the white fire captain who made the noose received a slap on the wrist and is still working. We will be taking legal action on this."

Shelby Stewart, a Black police officer who has a pending civil rights lawsuit against the Houston Police Department, and several members of the S.H.A.P.E. Council of Elders also spoke at the press conference.

—Report and photo by Gloria Rubac



At May 7 press conference, Shelby Stewart holds up a noose similar to the one found at Fire Station #41.


## Boston community says 'NO TO RESEGREGATION'



Councilor Chuck Turner, with beard, spoke at the Coalition for Equal Quality Education's press conference at English High School in Boston on May 11 to build for a larger community summit on May 14 to say no to the Mayor's five-zone school district plan to resegment schools in Boston. Parents, teachers and students all spoke out at the press conference against the plan. Kervin Voyard of the Powerful Students of CASH (Community Academy of Science and Health), who walked out of school 60 strong to protest unequal treatment for Haitian students at the School Department headquarters, also spoke.

—Report and photo by Liz Green





**MAY 31**  
**PEOPLE'S**  
**ECONOMIC**  
**SUMMIT**  
**NYC**

In conjunction with the U.N.  
Summit on the World  
Economic Crisis.

**Starting Time—11:00 a.m. The People's Summit Tent in Dag Hammarskjöld Plaza,**  
47th St. & 1st Ave. See **BailOutPeople.Org** or call 212-633-6646.



# Chrysler workers: ‘We are not shark bait’

*Following are excerpts from a talk given at New York City’s Workers World Party meeting on May 8 by Martha Grevatt, a 21-year Chrysler worker. Go to [www.workers.org](http://www.workers.org) to hear the entire talk.*

Our late founder and chairperson Sam Marcy was fond of a saying, “Socialism is as socialism does.” It could also be said that capitalism is as capitalism does.

Capitalism is a system of exploitation of workers for profit. An example of what it does is going on in the U.S. Bankruptcy Court. What capitalism is doing to 27,000 Chrysler workers, along with 82,000 retirees, has ramifications for our whole class. In fact, a spokesperson for Moody’s Investor Services stated, “The Chrysler bankruptcy is historic and may become either a template or a warning sign for future bankruptcies, such as that of General Motors.”

I’ll explain the week’s events and place them in historic context. On April 29 UAW [United Auto Workers] workers at Chrysler voted to make a number of concessionary changes to a four-year contract that runs to 2011. None of what we just gave up can be understood purely from a dollars-and-cents standpoint.

In 1937 after a 44-day sit-down General Motors recognized the UAW. Of eight demands, one, to this day, has not been realized: “Six-hour day and 30-hour week; time and one-half for work above these.” What the UAW did get in 1938 was time-

and-a-half after an eight-hour day. Now, just in time for May Day, we lost the eight-hour day.

One issue that fueled militant actions, from the sit-downs in the 30s to the wildcats led by Black workers in the 70s, was the speedup. When the company wanted more production, the boss made the line go faster. With high tech, the number of workers needed on a line could be decreased as much as tenfold, but the line is much slower. Now we have a de facto speedup in the form of shorter break time and loss of one paid holiday. What will it save the company in wages? About \$40 million, which Chrysler will easily burn through in court fees to lawyers and “restructuring specialists.” But the company potentially gets 1.2 million additional hours of labor—or over 40,000 vehicles. We barely have time to get a cup of coffee.

Up until the 50s, the 30-hour week was raised at UAW conventions, but by then the left-wing had been pushed out. The anti-communist UAW president, Walter Reuther, actually opposed 30 hours’ work at 40 hours’ pay as a danger to national security. The UAW pushed for a “Guaranteed Annual Wage”—the origin of the Supplemental Unemployment Benefits, which are added to state unemployment benefits. Around this time the UAW won the “improvement factor”—an annual wage increase that reflected continued improvements in productivity.

Now SUB benefits have been cut back

to as little as 26 weeks. You lose that if you turn down an offer of work anywhere in the country. In 2007 the improvement factor was sacrificed and substituted with lump sum bonuses—a pay cut. Now the bonuses are “suspended” along with the Cost of Living Allowance, also won over five decades ago.

Reading the press, you would think we were getting a great deal because “we” now own 55 percent of the company! No, we don’t. A union-administered fund for retiree health care, set up to help the company, was forced to take half the company contribution in admittedly worthless stock. Retirees are getting robbed!

Only a few thousand votes kept the 2007 contract from being rejected. The most controversial aspect was the two-tier wage. Now wages for new hires are frozen at \$14 an hour until the end of the next contract that will run from 2011 to 2015!

When the union and management negotiate that contract, any unresolved issues will go directly to binding arbitration, and the arbitrator will be obligated to reduce our wage and benefit package so that it’s equal to the non-union auto plants. We don’t even get a vote! And we are barred from striking until 2015!

The workers voted four-to-one for these measures because the alternative presented to them was that Chrysler would be forced into bankruptcy. One day later, what did Chrysler do? Declare bankrupt-

cy. The workers were double-crossed!

The workers voted with no knowledge of any additional plant closings. It was only in court that Chrysler’s attorneys revealed that four plants, including my plant in Twinsburg, Ohio, were to be closed by the end of next year. The day before the mayor of Twinsburg and other elected officials were led to believe that the plant would not be closed. We were tricked into voting for this contract. Now the language which bars plants from closing is being trashed. Last year upper management was given huge bonuses because “it was in their contract.”

Why are these plants being sold? To generate enough capital to settle Chrysler’s obligation to JP Morgan Chase, Morgan Stanley, Citigroup and Goldman Sachs, along with a few dozen hedge funds. Five thousand workers are losing their jobs so these finance capital sharks can get theirs.

Autoworkers are people, not shark bait! One thing speculators never speculate on, and that’s the class struggle. The protest rallies have already begun over these plant closings.

We need you in Detroit June 14 to 17 for the People’s Summit. All the bankers, the auto bosses, all the big capitalists are coming to the town they ruined. So are we, and so should you. □

## Fight to save Employee Free

*Continued from page 1*

nity to let the capitalist political establishment in Washington know that, without EFCA, there will be no peace. Lobbying the Democrats, waiting for them to pay back the labor movement for its support during the elections, is a dangerous strategy. The Democrats are still a party loyal to big business, no matter how much money they get from the labor movement.

### Bosses in all-out offensive against EFCA

Three days after getting \$25 billion in federal bailout money, Bank of America on Oct. 17 organized a conference call against EFCA. Among those on the call was the former CEO of Home Depot, Bernie Marcus.

Marcus called the bill “the demise of a civilization” and said, “If a retailer has not gotten involved with this ... if he has not sent money to Norm Coleman [a Minnesota Republican who lost a close senatorial election—FG] and those other guys,” then those retailers “should be shot; should be thrown out of their goddamn jobs.” Those on the call were encouraged to make “large contributions” to sink the bill.

Wal-Mart CEO Lee Scott, one of the leaders in the anti-EFCA campaign, told an analysts’ meeting on Oct. 28: “We like driving the car and we’re not going to give the steering wheel to anybody but us.” (All quotes above from Wall Street Journal, Nov. 19)

On March 11, in a conference call organized by Citigroup, which has received \$75 billion in bailout funds, Glenn Spencer, a senior executive at the U.S. Chamber of Commerce, called for stirring up opposition to the EFCA. (Huffington Post, March 12)

### Leading Democrats water it down

This pressure has come down on the Democratic Party. Right now the 60 votes needed in the Senate to keep the Republicans from stopping the bill are not there. The Democrats are caught between the labor movement and big business. As a

## Alabama detention center

# ‘Operation Panty’ makes delivery to immigrant women

By Dianne Mathiowetz  
Gadsden, Ala.

On May 9, three members of the Georgia Detention Watch made a second solidarity trip to the Etowah Detention Center in Gadsden, Ala., to deliver hundreds of pairs of cotton underwear to women immigrant detainees.

Originally planned as a Mothers’ Day delegation with access to the unit of the jail where around 150 women are held for unspecified periods of time pending deportation, the musical program, extended visiting time and communal dinner were all canceled because of H1N1 (swine flu)

precautions advised by the Center for Disease Control.

Nevertheless, immigrant rights activists were not deterred from bringing personal hygiene items as a gesture of support and expression of opposition to the indignities and injustice of the detainees’ incarceration.

“Operation Panty” initiator, America Gruner, said, “We were shocked to learn that the women held at Etowah were wearing orange-mesh men’s boxers that are not only uncomfortable, but totally unsuitable to preserving their sanitary needs during their monthly periods. Through donations of many people, we were able to bring hun-

dreds of pairs of cotton underwear today.”

The briefs had handwritten notes attached, expressing Mother’s Day greetings for the reunification of immigrant families. Georgia Detention Watch made its first solidarity visit for International Women’s Day this past March.

Gruner continued, “Although we are very disappointed not to be able to personally honor the mothers held at Etowah, so cruelly separated from their children, we will hopefully be able to reschedule another visit soon.” For more information, go to [www.gadetentionwatch.org](http://www.gadetentionwatch.org)

*The writer was a member of the three-person delegation.*



## UAW workers rally to keep plant open

Over 400 members of UAW Local 122 came together May 11 to try to stop the closing of Chrysler’s Twinsburg Stamping Plant in Twinsburg, Ohio. From the union’s Web site, members were urged to “pack the hall” for a meeting on the plant’s future that featured Twinsburg Mayor Katherine Procop and Ohio Senator Sherrod Brown. Angry questions focused on the fact that the closing of Twinsburg and three other plants was a violation of the union contract, highlighting the double standard of upholding contracts involving executive salaries while allowing companies to flagrantly violate contracts with hourly workers. Workers held signs that read “An Injury to One is an Injury to All,” and “No Human Being is a Bad Asset,” a reference to the 5,000 workers who will lose their jobs if Chrysler sells their plants as “bad assets.” The meeting ended with workers chanting, “The people have spoken! Keep the plant open!”

—Report and photo by Martha Grevatt

# Teach-in demands EFCA passage, bailout for workers



**Audience responds to talk by labor leader, Clarence Thomas, above left, about fighting attacks on labor and the community at the May 9 teach-in.**



WW PHOTOS: JUDY GREENSPAN

Over 200 people attended a May 9 teach-in and mass action organizing meeting in San Francisco to “Bail Out Working People, Not the Banks!” The event was initiated and supported by the San Francisco Labor Council, the South Bay Labor Council, the Alameda County Central Labor Council and the Workers Emergency Recovery Campaign. The organizing committee was comprised of progressive trade unionists and labor council delegates.

Chaired by Conny Ford, vice-president of the San Francisco Labor Council, the teach-in began with several greetings from Bay Area organized-labor leaders. Tim Paulson, S.F. Labor Council executive director, called upon everyone to get involved in the fight to pass the Employee Fair Choice Act. “EFCA is not only the most importance piece of legislation for working men and women since the 30s, it also lets workers pick how they want to join these unions, not the corporations,” stated Paulson.

Alan Benjamin, a member of the S.F. Labor Council Executive Committee, WERC and a member of the organizing committee, stated very clearly today’s theme: “Our unions’ only role is to defend the jobs of our members. We say, not one layoff.”

Benjamin went on to talk about the growing national labor and community fightback against the layoffs, foreclosures and giveaways to the banks. “We are going to propose supporting a series of actions in Detroit [organized by the Moratorium Now! Coalition and others] with a local demonstration on June 13 around the demand, ‘Bail Out the People, Not the Banks!’” Benjamin told the crowd.

Community leaders from POWER (People Organized to Win Employment Rights) and Coleman Advocates for Children and Youth, challenged the crowd of union activists and officials to actively support and embrace grassroots community efforts against foreclosures and evictions, gentrification of poor communities, Immigration and Customs Enforcement raids and attacks on quality education for young people of color.

Steven Williams, executive director of POWER, condemned the gentrification by the banks and developers in Black and Brown communities of the Bay Area. “Housing should be a human right for all, not a commodity,” Williams told the crowd.

N’tanya Lee, executive director of Coleman Advocates, described the impact of gentrification and “racial tracking” on Black and Brown children in the Bay area. Lee called upon labor to stand together with communities of color to “fight these injustices.”

Clarence Thomas, a leader of the International Longshore and Warehouse Union, Local 10, talked about his recent trip to Cuba. “In Cuba, people have free health care from the cradle to the grave and undergraduate and graduate education does not cost young people a dime.” Thomas contrasted this picture with what is happening today to poor and working people in this country.

Thomas challenged the audience to work to pass the EFCA. He alluded to the

several port shutdowns led by the ILWU and noted that civil disobedience will have to be part of our struggle.

Following the teach-in, several ideas for local actions were discussed during an open mike period. The proposal to support the People’s Summit in Detroit by holding a local action on June 13 to demand, “Bail Out the People, Not the Banks!” and others will be taken up at a follow-up organizing meeting.

—Report & photos by Judy Greenspan

## Employee Fair Choice Act!

party whose leadership relies on the labor movement but is fundamentally tied to the capitalist class, it is wavering in the direction of a rotten compromise that would gut the bill.

Sen. Tom Harkin of Iowa, the sponsor of EFCA, has said the card check may have to go. Sen. Dianne Feinstein of California is offering a mail-in ballot to the NLRB as a substitute. At least five Democratic senators have said they won’t vote for the bill with card-check in it. And Sen. Arlen Specter of Pennsylvania, who just switched to the Democrats, is exerting his right-wing pressure.

In this connection it is worth recalling a statement made in frustration recently by Sen. Dick Durban of Illinois. A bill he had introduced to permit judges to modify homeowners’ mortgages was defeated in the Senate after 12 Democrats voted against it. “Frankly, the banks control the place,” blurted out Durban.

The right to collective bargaining was won in the first place through the class struggle of the 1930s. It is dangerous to think that legislation strongly favorable to the union movement and the working class can be secured without struggle.

The unions have organized small demonstrations around the country supporting EFCA. Thousands of signatures on petitions have been sent to Congress. Tens of thousands of phone calls have been made. All that is helpful. But it is fear of the workers and their organized strength that can be decisive in securing an EFCA that contains the card check, negotiating requirements and sanctions on employers who violate the law.

The reservoir of resources that was drawn on to get the Democrats elected should be turned instead into a mobilizing fund to force the politicians to pass EFCA in its original form. This is the time to declare: No card check, no peace!

*Fred Goldstein is the author of “Low-Wage Capitalism: Colossus with Feet of Clay” which can be ordered at Leftbooks.com.*

## Prisoner praises ‘Low-Wage Capitalism’

*Mosi O. Paki is a prisoner in Lebanon Correctional Institution in Youngstown, Ohio. He has been there in solitary confinement since 1996. Paki was a prisoner at the Lucasville, Ohio, prison during an uprising there in 1993 and did not participate in the uprising. Nevertheless, he was framed up by prison authorities for the murder of a prison guard. He was accused by two prisoners who were threatened with the death penalty. Both prisoners have subsequently recanted their testimony in writing. Paki was never tried in a court of law but simply convicted by the prison authorities at a prison hearing. He considers himself a political prisoner of war (PPOW). He is fighting for his freedom and more information about his case will be published in these pages soon.*

*Paki’s letter is addressed to Fred Goldstein, author of “Low-Wage Capitalism.”*

Dear Brother Fred,

Early in December I received your autographed copy of “Low-Wage Capitalism.” I wanted to personally thank you for this very informative book that is a must-read for conscious and unconscious people in the U.S. It is like your articles in Workers World newspaper. It hits home the truth about the ills of capitalism and its branch of imperialism, these recession years and this undeclared depression we are entering.

Those I’ve shared your book with can’t stop talking about their awakening. Hopefully they will get their own copies to share with others as well. Thanks again, Brother Fred.

In Solidarity in the Struggle,  
Mosi O. Paki

## Chicago Hartmarx workers vote to sit in

By J. Hill

On May 11, some 500 workers at the Chicago-based apparel firm Hart Schaffner Marx, or Hartmarx, held a rally and historic “sit-in” vote to fight for their jobs. Many held signs reading, “Bail Out People, Not Banks.” Wells Fargo, a Troubled Assets Relief Fund recipient, has pushed for a bankruptcy shuttering of the facility.

“Wells Fargo has received \$25 billion in taxpayer assistance through TARP. In other words, the workers Wells Fargo may throw out on the street have been subsidizing its operations during these tough economic times. So much for returning the favor,” said U.S. Rep. Phil Hare, who worked for 13 years as a cutter in the men’s clothing industry. (Workers United press release, May 11)

The Hartmarx workers voted in favor of a sit-in style action, which means the workers will physically remain at their job site if Wells Fargo or a buyer tries to begin liquidation or close the factory.

Political and labor leaders are standing up for Hartmarx workers, who are members of Workers United, an affiliate of the Service Employees union, and denouncing Wells Fargo. Illinois State Treasurer Alexi Giannoulias has vowed, “Unless the company remains open, [Wells Fargo] will not be doing business with the state of Illinois any longer.”

Tom Balanoff, president of the SEIU Illinois State Council, announced May 12 that a hot line is being established to centralize information about banks and companies that have received TARP money and threaten to liquidate or close factories. He said hundreds more factories nationwide are threatening to close.

The hot line, which will allow workers to report information, is expected to be available starting May 14. This will allow organizers to be dispatched to intervene with direct action at banks and plants around the country.

With the Hartmarx workers’ struggle, the banks and bosses are being put on no-

tice that the sit-in form of resistance may well become a popular form of workers’ response to the threat of more job losses and company closures.

Workers are learning to take action, organize community support and fight back. They are taking inspiration from the workers’ December sit-in at the Republic Windows and Doors factory in Chicago. Workers there seized the plant when Bank of America withdrew credit, forcing bosses to close the plant. This violated federal laws requiring that workers receive 60-days pre-notification and compensation.

“Voting to sit in, these workers are standing up for all of us,” stated Noel Beasley, director of the Chicago/Midwest Regional Joint Board and executive vice-president of Workers United, the union representing the Hartmarx workers, in a union press release. “The vote [May 11] says Hartmarx workers are going to hold banks accountable for how they spend taxpayers’ money and how they contribute to the future of our economy.” □



# GI RESISTANCE ROUNDUP

## Army GI refuses to serve in Afghanistan

“There is no way I will deploy to Afghanistan. The occupation is immoral and unjust. It does not make the American people any safer. It has the opposite effect,” said Army Specialist Victor Agosto, who has already served one tour in Iraq in almost four years in the Army. He spoke on May 7 with Alice Embree of “The Rag Blog,” publication of the Austin Movement for a Democratic Society. Agosto was slated for release at the end of June. But the Army “stop-lossed” him and ordered him to Afghanistan. Agosto spoke at Under the Hood, a gathering spot for GIs, families and friends in Killeen, Texas. “The supportive ‘family’ I have found at Under the Hood helped me muster up the courage to resist,” he said.

## Iraq vets rally against stop-loss at Ft. Lewis

Iraq Veterans led a rally outside Fort Lewis on May 9 to oppose the stop-loss policy of forcing GIs into multiple combat tours. The protest occupied the Freedom Bridge on Highway 5 near Fort Lewis. Michael William, director of Coffee Strong, a center dedicated to helping GIs, told Workers World that five-to-six-dozen

people marched—some recently demobilized veterans still in uniform—accompanied by a nine-person marching band. Fort Lewis, the largest Army base on the West Coast, is slated to deploy three infantry brigades to Iraq and Afghanistan over the next four months. Seth Manzel, a Stryker Brigade veteran and director of the website GIvoice.org, said in a web-cast on the site, “We are standing with soldiers’ families ... to rally against the systematic mistreatment of soldiers ... which maintains Stop-Loss as a backdoor draft.” About 58,300 GIs were stop-lossed between 2002 and 2007, according to the May 9, 2008, Los Angeles Times. Some 13,000 personnel are currently stop-lossed. (New York Times, March 13) Ex-Marine Andrew VanDenBergh added in a May 8 GI Voice article that “many [GIs] are denied access to the mental and physical health care they desperately need, and some are sent back into combat completely untreated.”

### Cliff Cornell sentenced to 12 months for desertion

A U.S. Army court martial on April 28 at Ft. Stewart, Ga., convicted 28-year-old Specialist Clifford Cornell of desertion and sentenced him to 12 months in a military jail, reduction in pay-grade to private, and a “bad conduct” discharge.

Cornell turned himself in at Fort Stewart Feb. 17 after being denied refugee status in Canada. He left Fort Stewart four years ago when his artillery unit was ordered to Iraq. He said Army trainers told him he must shoot any Iraqi who came near his vehicle, and he didn’t want to do it. Cornell’s civilian attorney James Branum told UPI: “The Army is engaging in overkill in order to make an example of my client. Cliff is being punished for what he believes. ... Because he spoke out against the Iraq war, Cliff’s sentence is harsher than the punishment given to 94 percent of deserters who are not penalized but administratively discharged.” (April 29) Still, Jeff Paterson of Courage To Resist said in an April 29 article posted on its website that Cornell could have faced five years and a dishonorable discharge were it not for significant support from individuals across the country. This support made experienced civilian legal representation possible. Paterson is calling for letters to the Fort Stewart Commander requesting that Cornell’s sentence be reduced. These let-



Anti-war Lt. Ehren Watada and his parents.

ters will be collected by Cornell’s lawyer Branum and submitted to the military through the official appeals process. Address letters to COMMANDER, Fort Stewart and fax to Branum at 866-757-8785. (Please do not send letters directly to the Commander but fax them directly to Branum.) Paterson also said: “President Obama should bring all the troops home now. And he should grant amnesty to Cliff Cornell and hundreds of GIs who refused to take part in an occupation that has killed untold tens of thousands of men, women and children.”

## Case dropped against Lt. Ehren Watada!

Supporters of Lt. Ehren Watada successfully pressed the U.S. Solicitor General to drop the Army’s appeals against Watada, the first Army officer to refuse to participate in the Iraq War, Courage to Resist reports. Watada’s attorney, James Lobsenz, told AP that Watada expects to be released soon from active duty and “plans to return to civilian life and to attend law school.” (May 6)

–Dee Knight

# U.S. Army recruits 13-year-olds

By Kermit Leibensperger  
Philadelphia

Seven demonstrators were arrested May 2 at the “Army Experience Center” at the Franklin Mills Mall in north Philadelphia in the struggle against the latest U.S. crime against humanity: the recruiting of 13-year-olds. This Army recruitment center was effectively shut down for over an hour until police made the arrests. Prior to this, well over 200 people held a spirited march through the streets of the adjacent working-class neighborhood and then blocked the entrance of the Army’s new \$12-million-plus video game recruiting center. The protesters handed a criminal complaint to the Army’s commanding officer at the mall and to mall management. The Franklin Mills Mall is owned by the Simon Property Group, Inc., the biggest retail outlet owner on the entire planet. The Pentagon is in flagrant violation of the treaty to prevent the military recruitment of children, the Optional Protocol on the Involvement of Children in Armed Conflict, which the U.S. Senate ratified in 2002 along with 124 other nations. The U.S. propaganda machine castigates popular liberation struggles—like those in Palestine—for allegedly using children as fighters. And these are struggles where the oppressor army targets civilians, including children. Here, where the Pentagon is actively recruiting children for future use as cannon fodder, there has been no significant protest in the corporate media. The government has insidiously planted high-tech weapon simulators next to the mall’s skating rink, music store and other mall businesses frequented by youth. These real weapons system simulators have movie theater-sized screens that can’t be missed through twenty-foot-high plate glass windows, luring and trap-

ping poor and working class youth into the despicable task of killing the youth of the Middle East for the profit of oil companies. Philadelphia locals told Workers World that the huge Franklin Mills facility is the Army’s prototype. Another such installation has been built in Ohio, and lots more like them are planned. The united aim of the several dozen youth, veteran, religious, community, educational and left organizations that participated today is to shut all of them down! Organizers vowed to mount larger demonstrations. □

# Bravo, Maestro Zimmerman!

By Milos Raickovich

One of the most celebrated pianists of our time recently carried out an unexpected and courageous act of political activism. Before performing the final piece of his recital at Disney Hall in Los Angeles on April 26, the Polish pianist Krystian Zimerman addressed the audience, saying that he could no longer play in a country whose military wants to control the whole world. Zimerman also mentioned Guantánamo Bay and expressed outrage against U.S. military and political domination over Poland with the words: “Get your

hands off of my country.” (Los Angeles Times, April 27) Zimerman was referring to the U.S. attempt to place anti-missile rockets in Poland, an unpopular move in Poland. When a few people in the audience walked out, some shouting obscenities, Zimerman replied, “Yes, some people, when they hear the word military, start marching.” A majority of the audience cheered Zimerman, who then finished his program, playing Szymanowski’s “Variations on a Polish Folk Theme.” According to the critic Mark Swed, the final piece was played with “astonishing ferocity that brought nothing but tumultuous cheers.” This kind of activism is exceptional in the somewhat isolated world of classical music. Unlike a number of artists of popular-music genres who use the stage to express their progressive political views and are willing to suffer financial and other consequences, most of the classical performers and composers in the U.S. shy away from taking a stand on anything that could damage their individual careers. Zimerman, however, is not alone. There is a tradition of Polish pianists and composers who brought politics to the concert stage. The line includes our contemporary, the Polish-American composer and pianist Frederic Rzewski (composer of such works as “36 Variations on ‘El pueblo unido jamás será vencido’—‘The people united, will never be defeated’”), as well as Ignacy Jan Paderewski, and Fryderyk Chopin, whose works, like his “Revolutionary Etude,” were 19th century pieces of protest over foreign empires’ domination of Poland. Zimerman’s act is also significant as a reflection of popular sentiment in today’s Poland, and it speaks of the potential for resistance to the U.S. and NATO domination in this former socialist country. Raickovich is a Belgrade, Yugoslavia-born, world-renowned composer.

# The Angola Three

*Continued from page 2* with African Americans composing over 75 percent of Angola’s 5,108 prisoners, prison guards known as “free men,” a forced 40-hour workweek, and four cents an hour as minimum wage, the resemblance to antebellum U.S. slavery is striking. In the early 1970s, it was even worse, as prisoners were forced to work 96-hour weeks (16 hours a day, 6 days a week) with two cents an hour as minimum wage. Officially considered (according to its own website) the “Bloodiest Prison in the South” at this time, violence from guards and between prisoners was endemic. Prison authorities sanctioned prisoner rape, and according to former Prison Warden Murray Henderson, the prison guards actually helped facilitate a brutal system of sexual slavery where the younger and physically weaker prisoners were bought and sold into submission. As part of the notorious “inmate trusty guard” system, responsible for killing 40 prisoners and seriously maiming 350 from 1972-75, some prisoners were given state-issued weapons and ordered to enforce this sexual slavery, as well as

the prison’s many other injustices. Life at Angola was living hell—a 20th century slave plantation. The Angola Panthers saw life at Angola as modern-day slavery and fought back with non-violent hunger strikes and work strikes. Prison authorities were outraged by the BPP’s organizing, and overwhelming evidence has since emerged that authorities retaliated by framing these three BPP organizers for murders that they did not commit. Three court cases are now pending: the federal civil rights lawsuit at the U.S. Middle District Court, Albert Woodfox’s appeal at the U.S. Fifth Circuit, and Wallace’s appeal at the State Supreme Court. At this critical stage, a new DVD has just been released by PM Press, titled “The Angola 3: Black Panthers and the Last Slave Plantation.” The DVD is narrated by death-row journalist Mumia Abu-Jamal, and features footage of King’s 2001 release, as well as an interview with King and a variety of former Panthers and other supporters of the Angola 3. For more information, please visit [www.angola3.org](http://www.angola3.org). □



‘All for the Revolution!’

International delegations stand with Cuba on May Day

By Cheryl LaBash  
Havana, Cuba

First-time visitors from the U.S. were unsure what the day would hold as they watched dawn break in Revolution Square on May Day morning.

The international delegations—more than 2,000 in all from 70 countries, including union leaders and revolutionaries, often both in the same person, and representing 200 union and solidarity organizations—streamed off buses and into the reviewing area at the foot of the José Martí statue.

They chatted, chanted and taped their banners to the walls displaying the international demand to free the five Cuban heroes imprisoned in the U.S. as they waited for the program and march to begin. It was a global echo of the message President Barack Obama received at the recent Summit of the Americas: End the blockade! Cuba is not alone, and U.S. imperialism is not invincible!

“Why are there so few people in the Plaza?” one queried—before the Cuban workers marched in, wave after wave, for hours. “Will Cuban President Raul Castro speak?” A cheer greeted Castro when he appeared, but it was the Confederation of Cuban Workers [Central de Trabajadores de Cuba—CTC] General-Secretary Salvador Valdés Mesa who addressed the International Workers’ Day event in Havana, as is customary on May Day.

This May Day was the 50th since the 1959 revolution broke free of the colonial past and charted a path of development to meet peoples’ needs instead of profit and exploitation. It also marked the 70th anniversary of the founding of the CTC, which has been instrumental, side-by-side with the Communist Party of Cuba,

in developing workers’ power. And it was the workers and youth who marched in Havana with the theme of unity, combativeness, productivity and efficiency. They carried representations of their workplaces such as a huge cigar from the La Corona factory, a taxi, housing construction brigades with tools, and pictures of rebuilding the 500,000 dwellings destroyed by the three hurricanes suffered in 2008.

Gigantic Cuban and Venezuelan flags, supported by hundreds of youth, undulated like ocean waves. Multiple massive delegations from the UJC Communist Youth Union [Unión de Jóvenes Comunistas] marched with the message: “The youth will not fail. All for the revolution!” Gymnasts and professional dancers, fresh and energetic, entered the square. Handmade signs demanded freedom for the Cuban Five, saluted and supported Cuban leaders Fidel and Raul, and saluted socialism.

Delores Lemon-Thomas, visiting from Richmond, Calif., recalled marching around the White House protesting the U.S. invasions of Iraq and Afghanistan and seeing heavily armed troops burdened with body armor along with rooftop snipers, as well as police phalanxes controlling San Francisco protests. She noted she was only a few hundred feet away from the Cuban president and that, with hundreds of thousands marching in the street, only unarmed youth gently encouraged the marchers not to stop to take pictures at the José Martí monument.

Another example of the contrast between life witnessed in Cuba and experi-

enced in the U.S. was expressed on May Day by CTC leader Salvador Valdés Mesa, who spoke of the global economic crisis and supported the Cuban government’s efforts “to protect the people from the effects of the crisis.

“Even more so, at a time when humanity is immersed in a global economic crisis making the political, economic and social situation more complex globally, this impacts on the people, and workers face bleak prospects from which no country can escape.

“In our case, this is compounded by the effects of the ironclad economic blockade that the U.S. government has maintained

for almost half a century, with the obsessive and failed object of destroying the Revolution.

“The unity and resistance in the face of any obstacle, which Fidel has formed within us, are pillars on which the Cuban Revolution is triumphantly erected and have become the central and constant battle flags. We will continue supporting with determination the measures that our government adopts to reduce the effects of the crisis on the population.”

And that is the profound difference between a social system based on capitalism, with its profits for banks and corporations, and socialism. □



WWW PHOTO: CHERYL LABASH

Cubans carry banner on May Day that says “Workers--we decide and direct our socialism”.

A look at the Ecuador & Panama presidential elections

By Berta Joubert-Ceci

Ecuador, with a population of more than 14 million, re-elected President Rafael Correa on April 26 and Panama, with 3 million, elected as president businessperson Ricardo Martinelli on May 3. Both these Latin American countries have “dollarized” economies, that is, they use the U.S. dollar as their official currency. The aspiration of both peoples, as well as those all over the world, is to have a better life. Will these elections help attain that goal?

Latin America’s progressive turn

The recent broad ascension into government of leftist or more progressive forces is a new political development in Latin America’s political history. Despite contradictions and diverse political ideologies that vary from mere reformist and social democratic to pro-socialist and revolutionary, these changes are a leap away from the pro-imperialist dictatorships that devastated the region in the past. This has awoken hope among all the peoples in the region, particularly those most excluded and exploited who want no return to that past.

One important consideration about this development is the way that the new

government is established. Is winning the highest office in itself the ultimate goal? Will a victory simply mean managing the capitalist state? Or will it further involve the population and deepen the struggle for socialism, which in the end is the only way to attain real peace with social and economic justice?

A second consideration, the new president’s relationship with the United States, can help answer these questions. The White House and the Pentagon don’t see every Latin American country in the same light. Colombia, the closest U.S. ally and Venezuela, Washington’s “headache,” are the prime examples of these differences to keep in mind.

The degree of Washington’s interference, whether through the CIA, its associated organizations or the U.S. embassies in the various countries, can show U.S. hostility or friendliness to the current governments. Make no mistake, however. Washington will try to eliminate any progressive government that U.S. officials believe will undermine U.S. control and interests in any country in the region.

Compare the U.S.’s relatively warmer relations toward Argentina, Brazil, Chile and Panama, with its blatant hostility to Bolivia, Cuba, Ecuador and Venezuela, where it

actively helps organize the right-wing opposition to the current governments.

Ecuador elections bring a welcome relief for the masses

In Ecuador, where the Correa government expelled the first secretary and an attaché of the U.S. Embassy for interfering with Ecuadorian internal affairs, Correa was re-elected in a historic electoral victory. Before Correa took office in January 2007, corruption and disregard for the people had been the standards of Ecuador’s government, which had seven presidents in the 10 years from 1996 to 2006.

Mass struggle opened the door for President Correa to the highest office. He has made transparency and self-determination a key component of his administration. In what is called the Revolución Ciudadana (Citizen’s Revolution), the current process has made many changes on behalf of the poorest of its population, particularly the Indigenous.

When Correa first took office, he promised a new constitutional assembly to create a new path for the country. Constitutions alone are not a revolutionary solution, but they can be the basis for popular organizing and developing the necessary changes that raise consciousness that can

then lead to a real people’s power. What Correa has in common with Venezuelan President Hugo Chávez is the involvement of the peoples. Correa writes, “It is not the task of one man or a government, but of all the people.” (www.rafaelcorrea.com)

Some 64 percent of Ecuador’s voters approved the new constitution in a September 2008 referendum. The document begins by stating that it has been created by “the heirs of the struggle for social liberation against every form of domination and colonialism.” The aim of this new constitution is to attain the “sumak kawsay,” Quechua words meaning “a good life.”

The constitution establishes a new economic concept of “social economy” that substitutes for “market economy” to achieve a more equal distribution of wealth. It guarantees universal access to education, health care, jobs, housing and other services. It prohibits the establishment of foreign military bases, therefore ending the U.S. contract to use its air base in Manta.

The constitution also establishes that no migrant is illegal and there is no death penalty. No discrimination is allowed on the basis of race, ethnicity, gender or sexual orientation, among other consider-

Continued on page 10





# Afghanistan & Guernica

**THE FACTS:** The U.S. Air Force bombed and strafed villages with heavy machine guns in the Farah province of Afghanistan on the evening and night of May 4. Col. Greg Julian, a spokesperson for the U.S. military in Kabul, admitted it.

The governor of the province, Rohul Amin, told the Afghan parliament that as many as 130 civilians had been killed, according to Mohammad Naim Farahi, a member of parliament. He reported that survivors buried 113 bodies, including many women and children. Later, more bodies were pulled from the rubble and some victims who had been taken to the hospital died.

“The governor said that the villagers have brought two tractor trailers full of pieces of human bodies to his office to prove the casualties that had occurred,” Farahi said. “Everyone at the governor’s office was crying, watching that shocking scene.”

Ghusuldin Agha, who lives in Granai village in the Bala Baluk district, said the bombing started at 5 p.m. and lasted until late into the night. “People were rushing to go to their relatives’ houses, where they believed they would be safe, but they were hit on the way.” Body parts were strewn over the ground.

Local farmer Muhammad Jan said: “Women and children had sought shelter in orchards and houses.” The bombardment completely destroyed houses and people “still remain under the rubble. Now I am working with other villagers trying to excavate the dead bodies.” According to a report on this atrocity in the May 6 New York Times, “Villagers, crazed with grief, were collecting mangled bodies in blankets and shawls and piling them on three tractors. People were still missing.”

Jessica Barry, a spokesperson for the International Committee of the Red Cross, reported the dead included a volunteer for the Afghan Red Crescent and 13 of his relatives.

**THE LIE:** “We have some other information that leads us to distinctly different conclusions about the cause of the civilian casualties,” said the senior U.S. commander in Afghanistan, Gen. David D. McKiernan, who was just fired by President Obama.

U.S. Defense Department officials who wouldn’t allow their names to be reported said investigators were looking into reports that the Afghan civilians were killed by grenades hurled by Taliban militants, and that the militants then drove the bodies around the village claiming the dead were victims of an American airstrike.

“We cannot confirm the report that the Taliban executed these people. ... We don’t know if it’s true, and we also don’t know how many civilians were killed as a result of this operation,” said Capt. John Kirby, spokesperson for the Joint Chiefs of Staff at the Pentagon.

**THE BIG LIE:** The town of Guernica, a historic symbol of the Basque nation, was attacked by Nazi German and fascist Italian bombers on April 26, 1937, during the Spanish Civil War, killing up to 1,600 civilians. The German Nazis supported the Spanish fascists, led by Gen. Francisco Franco. World-famous artist Pablo Picasso depicted the massacre in his painting “Guernica,” which has kept the fascist atrocity in people’s memory.

Germany’s Nazi dictator Adolf Hitler was well known for using the “Big Lie,” a brutal fascist repression of the truth. Franco, borrowing from this tactic, blamed the deaths in Guernica on Basque anti-fascists, and repressed the truth about German responsibility until his death in 1975.

Hitler and fascism arose in a time of capitalist crisis and decaying economic relations. Then and now the reality is a decaying capitalist system accompanied by burgeoning militarism. This time people are more interconnected worldwide and it’s difficult to cover up the monstrous crimes and the Pentagon’s big lies.

The problem is how to stop them. It can be done, and the struggle of the world’s people to overturn the U.S. military complex needs to be here in the belly of the beast. □

# A look at the Ecuador and Panama presidential elections

*Continued from page 9*

ations. This new constitution established the current electoral process, even though Correa had been in office less than three years.

## Panama, still needy 20 years after U.S. invasion

Voters in Panama went to the polls hoping to elect a president who would finally end corruption in government and bring about the transformation the country sorely needs. Panama’s unemployment rate is high and its income inequality the second greatest in all Latin America.

Martinelli, heading Cambio Democrático (Democratic Change), won with slightly more than 60 percent of the votes. He ran in an umbrella coalition, called Alianza para el Cambio (Alliance for Change). Some call Martinelli “a right-wing populist.”

Reminiscent of the successful Barack Obama campaign calling for “change,” Martinelli used electoral propaganda that resonated with the masses about bringing some relief to the many poor people and

ending the corruption epitomized by the current PRD (Democratic Revolutionary Party) president, Martín Torrijos, son of popular former military and political leader Omar Torrijos, who died in a suspicious plane explosion in 1981.

During the Martín Torrijos administration, Panama’s people saw neoliberal practices take hold in their country to the detriment of the poorest. Besides overseeing a growth in corruption, Omar Torrijos’ son signed a free trade agreement with the U.S. in 2006. His government adopted many other unpopular measures. Though Panama’s economy expanded, the majority’s quality of life rapidly deteriorated.

In spite of his popular-change propaganda and unlike Ecuador’s Correa, however, the new President Martinelli is closely allied to Washington, he embraces the anti-people Free Trade Agreement with the U.S., and he promised to decrease taxes for the rich. These policies promise no relief for the masses.

Progressive candidates for the presidency, one of whom was professor Juan

# Pakistanis denounce Zardari & Pentagon offensive

By Deirdre Griswold  
New York

Inside the Roosevelt Hotel in busy midtown Manhattan on May 10, Pakistani President Asif Ali Zardari was trying to reassure some 300 members of the expatriate community that his just-completed visit to Washington was not a capitulation to U.S. pressure.

But outside, a vigorous demonstration denounced the bloody government offensive in the Swat Valley that has caused more than half a million Pakistanis to flee their homes. In speeches and chants, delivered in Pashtun and other Pakistani languages as well as in English, the crowd of Pakistanis and their U.S. supporters assailed the brutal bombings by the Pakistan Air Force, pointing out that every bomb and bullet was supplied by the Pentagon.

When the meeting in the hotel ended, a group of more formally dressed Pakistanis emerged who had been inside. They were furious at Zardari for “begging” for U.S. money and for walking out of the meeting before they could address him with their questions and comments. A dozen joined the demonstration and denounced the Pakistani president to the crowd and the media cameras.

In Washington on May 7, Zardari had pledged at a joint news conference with Afghan President Hamid Karzai and U.S. Sens. John Kerry and Richard Lugar that Pakistan would continue the offensive until it had defeated the “terrorists.”

He was using language created in Washington to describe Islamic forces

opposed to the U.S. occupation of neighboring Afghanistan. To the people living in the border areas, however, the terrorists are those who send Predator and Raptor drones to launch Hellfire missiles into their homes and villages. For over a year, these pilotless planes sent by the Pentagon have rained down death and suffering on villagers in northwest Pakistan. The generals and the Western media then claim another victory against “terrorism.”

The anguish this has caused was apparent on the faces of the diverse group of Pakistanis. They came from various ethnic groups and expressed different political and religious views, but all called for an end to foreign interference in their country and a cessation of the military offensive.

A sizeable solidarity delegation from the International Action Center and Workers World Party came in support of the demonstration. Speakers emphasized that U.S. imperialism has been behind a long string of military dictatorships in Pakistan that have left the country divided between a highly privileged few versus an impoverished population.

They also addressed passersby on the street, pointing out how the billions of dollars spent to make Pakistan an ally of the Pentagon contribute to the growing impoverishment of the people here at home.

The demonstration was called by the Pakistan-U.S. Freedom Forum, which has been tireless in organizing the community against repression in their home country. □



WW PHOTOS: JOHN CATALINOTTO

## May 10 protest, NYC.

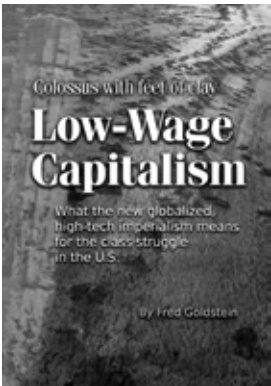
Jované, were blocked in these elections by the corrupted institutions. In Jované’s case, the Panamanian Supreme Court of Justice had finally decided only three days before the elections that he could run. Though several progressive organizations backed his candidacy, the decision came too late for him to run an effective campaign.

A victorious 2005 month-long general strike of the people against Martín Torrijos’ attempt to “reform” the country’s social security program showed that Panama’s people will still struggle to win the better life they deserve. Time will show that only the organized people can win a better life for themselves and future generations. □

# Low-Wage Capitalism

A timely new book by Fred Goldstein describes in sweeping detail the drastic effect on the working class of new technology and the restructuring of global capitalism in the post-Soviet era. It uses Karl Marx’s law of wages and other findings to show that these developments are not only continuing to drive down wages but are creating the material basis for future social upheaval, the end of working-class compromise and retreat and must end up in a profound revival of the struggle against capital.

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## May Day in South Africa

# Democratic elections, strike actions & economic crisis

By **Abayomi Azikiwe**  
Editor, Pan-African News Wire

The April 22 national elections in South Africa showed widespread continued political support for the ruling African National Congress. The ANC won close to a two-thirds majority in the elections, securing victories in all the provinces with the exception of the Cape, where the opposition Democratic Alliance won out over the ruling party.

This year's election was the fourth democratic poll since 1994, when the former racist apartheid system ended after decades of political, labor and armed struggle. The winner of this year's presidential vote was current ANC President Jacob Zuma. He is the fourth ANC president since 1994, following Nelson Mandela, Thabo Mbeki and Kgalema Motlanthe.

The vote comes amid escalating labor unrest in South Africa in response to both the burgeoning global economic crisis and the fact that while the unfolding national democratic revolution has scored monumental advances in the political arena, a more favorable distribution of economic resources has yet to be realized for the African majority of the population.

Zuma told a May Day rally of tens of thousands in East London that the new government will introduce legislation to further guarantee rights for the country's workers. "We want to introduce laws to regulate contract work, subcontracting and outsourcing," he said. (AFP, May 1)

These laws, which were included in the election manifesto of the ANC, will outlaw policies that allow abuse of workers as well as "labor brokering." This involves using contract work to get around existing labor laws. The Congress of South African Trade Unions (COSATU) has called for outlawing "labor brokering."

"It is a serious matter that while our Constitution talks about the rights of all and the rights of workers, we have workers that worked for decades without any security," Zuma said at the East London rally. He called upon corporate leaders to develop programs to protect jobs in the current economic climate.

"We reiterate our message to business that they should do everything possible to retain jobs," Zuma told the East London rally.

### Labor struggles & economic crisis

During annual May Day commemorations, workers in South Africa sent a strong message in defense of their class. COSATU organized 36 rallies throughout the country, the largest ones in the Eastern Cape.

Besides Zuma, speakers at May Day rallies included South African Communist Party General Secretary Blade Nzimande

and COSATU President Sidumo Dlamini.

At an earlier media briefing in Johannesburg, COSATU General Secretary Zwelinzima Vavi had said, "This is the worst economic environment which we celebrate Workers Day under. ... We want a very active president who is preoccupied with South Africa's survival in this economic crisis." (The Times of South Africa, April 30)

The Federation of Unions of South Africa and the National Council of Trade Unions, under the banner of another umbrella group, the South African Confederation of Trade Unions, selected the theme "Fighting for decent work through workers' unity." The general secretary of the National Council, Manene Samela, called for a focus by the Unemployment Insurance Fund on worker retraining of the unemployed.

The general secretary of the Federation of Unions of South Africa, Dennis George, proclaimed that May Day must focus on the need for legal safeguards for contract labor, subcontracting and outsourcing.

George also emphasized the Federation's support for the reduction in the usage of labor brokers. "It will mean punishing employers who do not provide decent work by refusing them state tenders. It is imperative that the government seriously invests in the creation of decent jobs for all," he said.

Leading up to May Day, a number of strikes have occurred in key industries involving transport, metals, municipal services and public health. In addition, the slow pace of the resolution of some of these strikes has threatened to bring about further work stoppages in broader sectors of the economy.

The South African Transport and Allied Workers' Union held a strike during April that affected the supply of petroleum and food.

On April 29, Dumisani Langa, a spokesperson for striking Metrobus workers, addressed 800 workers picketing the company's offices in Braamfontein, a suburb of Johannesburg. They went on strike to demand higher pay and the suspension of a manager. "We will strike until our demands are met. Metrobus did ask us to suspend it, but we cannot just suspend the strike without an offer."

A physicians' strike had a notable impact on the country's health care system. According to the Digital Journal, "Countrywide, some 26 public hospitals, located in areas which house tens of millions of the country's most destitute and vulnerable people, are the hardest-hit by the doctors' strike, including at the world's largest hospital in Soweto, Baragwanath."

The majority of the doctors involved in the strike were junior physicians and in-

terns who earn approximately \$700 per month in take-home salary. On April 29 it was reported in both the Star and Independent Online that the strike had ended with an agreement between the South African Medical Association, the Doctors' Forum and the provincial authorities. The physicians had been threatened with dismissal if they did not return to work.

At the same time doctors in KwaZulu Natal (KZN) province threatened to strike over poor conditions for doctors as well as patients.

Sex workers attended the May Day rallies as part of their campaign for decent working conditions, fair labor practices and an end to arbitrary arrests. COSATU Western Cape provincial secretary Tony Ehrenreich said, "It's not our place to make a moral judgment on prostitution. It's a reality in South Africa today. Those workers work under difficult and dangerous conditions, and they need protection just like every other South African." (Independent Online, May 1)

Over the last year the global economic crisis has severely affected South Africa. Unemployment is rising along with prices for food and transportation services.

Africa's largest steelmaker, the Luxembourg-based ArcelorMittal South Africa Ltd., could close some of its South African operations and permanently cut jobs if prices continue to spiral downward. In opposition to threatened layoffs, the National Union of Metalworkers of South Africa (NUMSA) plans to strike over the next two months. The company has already cut 1,000 contractor jobs in recent weeks.

## Irish autoworkers settle sit-down

After a 36-day occupation of the Visteon plant in Belfast, members of the union Unite voted May 5 to accept a settlement. Negotiated with former owner Ford, the agreement gives workers severance benefits ranging from six to 18 months' salary.

On March 31, after being given a six-minute notice that they were being sacked, workers took over the plant. Their "first and foremost demand," according to Unite Deputy Convenor Charlie Maxwell, was "that Ford Company reopen this plant. Our work was taken off of us under the guise of the recession and the credit crisis, none of which were applicable to us." (www.indymedia.ie, April 27)

One day later on April 1, English workers in Enfield took over their Visteon plant, while workers in Basildon, blocked from entering their plant, began a protest outside. Eight days later the Enfield workers were evicted but kept up a presence at the plant.

Strike supporters held solidarity rallies and picketed Ford dealerships. Toward the end of the Belfast occupation, Irish union members traveled to Basildon and Enfield to support their comrades. While

Despite earlier forecasts by some elements of the corporate media, the ANC has maintained its political dominance in South Africa. In the Cape Province, however, the opposition Democratic Alliance won 51.5 percent of the vote, prompting COSATU to warn against the DA continuing its agenda of "perpetuating white privilege." The union federation called for the DA to join in a coalition government with other parties in the province and threatened strike action if the African communities were not brought into the government there.

The South African Communist Party issued a statement on April 24 commending the millions of people who came out "to cast their votes in the fourth democratic elections of our country. The outcomes of the votes ... have reaffirmed the overwhelming confidence that our people have in the ANC. The ANC has, amidst all manner of pessimisms, including sustained negative media publicity, emerged with a renewed mandate to work together with our people to transform the South African society for the better. ... The SACP commits itself to deepening the political organization of the working class to play its rightful place as the leading motive force to deepen and consolidate our democracy." (www.sacp.org.za)

*Abayomi Azikiwe is the editor of the Pan-African News Wire. The writer has followed the political situation in South Africa and throughout the region of the subcontinent for many years.*



April 22 elections.



in England they lent support to parents occupying the roof of a primary school slated to be torn down.

The solidarity of the Irish workers forced Ford to extend the same severance agreement to workers in Enfield and Basildon.

While the Belfast plant will close, the settlement gives workers far more than what Visteon originally offered. "If we would have walked out, we would have never have gotten [this] far," Maxwell observed. "We are now a conscience for community action. ... People have been so kind. There's people who will be loathe to see the end of this occupation because it's been such a way of sticking together. It's given us a focus on life." (www.indymedia.ie, April 27)

As of this writing, the occupation was continuing, with workers refusing to leave until they have their money in hand.

—Martha Grevatt

**What YOU should know about the hidden war in Congo**  
—past & present

By Abayomi Azikiwe Reprinted from Workers World

Summit fails to resolve crisis

Nov. 20, 2008

Fighting continues in eastern Congo; imperialist states weigh intervention

Colonialists plot return

Nov. 13, 2008

E.U. ministers signal troop deployment to Congo

U.N. poised for broader intervention in Congo

Oct. 23, Oct. 30, Nov. 6, 2008

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## Chrysler: El gran robo automovilístico

### Declaración de bancarrota usada para atacar empleos, salarios y pensiones

Por Martha Grevatt

En una atmósfera de miedo e intimidación, l@s trabajadores/as de la Chrysler representad@s por el sindicato United Auto Workers votaron cuatro a uno el 29 de abril a favor de aceptar grandes concesiones. La consecuencia de no votar, se le dijo a l@s trabajadores/as, sería que la compañía se declararía en bancarrota. Un voto a favor significaría la seguridad de empleos y protección de las pensiones por medio de una nueva alianza con la compañía automovilística italiana Fiat.

Sin embargo, en menos de 24 horas después del recuento de los votos, la Chrysler les traicionó y presentó su petición de bancarrota bajo el Artículo 11. El 4 de mayo casi tod@s l@s emplead@s de la Chrysler en EEUU quedaron despedid@s mientras la cirugía de la bancarrota reforma a la Chrysler LLC en una más ajustada y cruel “Nueva Chrysler”.

Después de que se les dijo a l@s trabajadores/as que su sacrificio aseguraría la seguridad de empleo, Chrysler le contó al juez de bancarrota en Nueva York, Arthur J. González de sus planes de cerrar ochos de sus plantas para fines del 2010. Ya se sabía de cuatro plantas programadas a cerrar, pero l@s trabajadores/as en Wisconsin, Michigan, Missouri y Ohio se sorprendieron al darse cuenta de que sus plantas ahora se consideran “activos malos” y están a la venta. El 88 por ciento de l@s trabajadores/as en la planta de Twinsburg en Ohio votó a favor de las concesiones. No tenían ni idea.

**¡L@s trabajadores/as fueron estafad@s!**

Las enmiendas en los contratos incluían una carta estipulando que “Las partes discutieron el estado y los planes de manufactura a largo plazo para la planta de Twinsburg (TSP). ... La compañía está comprometida a estudiar estos planes con el deseo de que la TSP permanezca viable. ...Apreciamos el continuo apoyo de la UAW en la producción de un plan viable a largo plazo para la TSP”.

Las plantas Sterling Heights Assembly, Kenosha Engine y St. Louis North Assembly, como la de Twinsburg, estaban cubiertas por una moratoria contra el cierre de las plantas. Esta moratoria no estaba rescindida en las recientes modificaciones de los contratos. Mientras la Chrysler agradecía a l@s emplead@s el 30 de abril por votar a favor del contrato, procedía rápidamente a destruirlo, con su apetito despertado por el potencial de romper el contrato producto del proceso de bancarrota. Hasta el momento de este artículo l@s trabajadores/as esperan que la UAW Internacional desafíe los cierres anunciados.

Hasta el último momento a l@s miembros de la UAW y al público en general se les hizo creer que la bancarrota podía evitarse. La Chrysler, la Fiat, la UAW, la Auto Task Force, el Tesoro de los EEUU, el gobierno canadiense y casi todos los prestamistas que llevan las deudas de Chrysler supuestamente habían aceptado

los planes para una Nueva Chrysler.

Los prestamistas eran el último impedimento, pero al último minuto, JPMorgan Chase, Morgan Stanley, Citigroup, Goldman Sachs y varios prestamistas de fondos de alto riesgo (hedge funds) acordaron aceptar el pago en efectivo de \$2,2 mil millones para cancelar la deuda de \$6,9 mil millones en préstamos. Esto es en realidad el doble del valor que los préstamos tendrían en el mercado, pues actualmente valen sólo 15 centavos por dólar.

Sin embargo, este acuerdo que duplicaría el valor de sus inversiones, fue rechazado por tres fondos de alto riesgo, Oppenheimer, Stairway Captil y Perella Weinberg. La deuda de Chrysler que ellos llevan representa una parte muy pequeña de su diverso portafolio y probablemente no es más que unos pocos cientos de millones de dólares.

¿Cómo puede su postura tan recalcitrante, tan repugnante como es, hacer inevitable la bancarrota? ¿Por qué la Auto Task Force liderada por los ex banqueros inversionistas Steve Rattner y Ron Bloom no pudo haber extendido el período de 30 días que inicialmente le dio a la Chrysler para que desarrollara una reestructuración más agresiva? Pudo haber insistido en que la Chrysler adoptara la misma postura de “tómelo o déjelo” que los tres buitres tomaron con la UAW y la Canadian Auto Workers (CAW, Trabajadores/as de Autos de Canadá).

La CAW entregó \$19 por hora en concesiones después de que la Chrysler amenazara con irse completamente de Canadá.

Sin embargo, el Tesoro en vez de aplicar su poder financiero y político para suavizar la actitud de la compañía, tomó la misma línea dura hacia el sindicato. Fue el Tesoro quien dictó una extensión de la estructura de salario desigual (two-tier) acordada en el 2007, congelando el salario de “nivel de entrada” a \$14 la hora hasta el 2015.

La clase capitalista en su conjunto claramente está en consenso sobre este último robo de salarios y beneficios de la unión y está determinada a ver una industria automovilística más pequeña en los Estados Unidos. Durante meses en Washington y Wall Street se deseaba la bancarrota, tanto por demócratas como por republican@s.

El propósito declarado de la venta de las ocho plantas es conseguir capital para pagarle a los grandes bancos y a las compañías de finanzas. Los bancos, que optaron por descargar una porción de los préstamos de la Chrysler a tiburones prestamistas como Oppenheimer, han recibido cerca de \$100 mil millones a través del rescate del gobierno. Pero miles de trabajadores/as quedarán desemplead@s o serán forzad@s a reubicarse para que JPMorgan Chase y compañía reciban otro par de miles de millones de dólares.

El propósito de los préstamos era financiar la ronda anterior de reestructuración que ha reducido aproximadamente en un 50 por ciento la fuerza laboral de la Chrysler en menos de dos años, dejando

sólo a 27.000 trabajadores/as de la UAW en la compañía.

Pero los medios de comunicación corporativos han diseminado historias acerca del acuerdo tan bueno que la UAW supuestamente obtuvo. Este mito está siendo construido sobre el 55 por ciento de las acciones en la nueva compañía que tendrá la Asociación Beneficiaria Voluntaria de Empleados (ABVE). La ABVE, administrada por la UAW acordó en el 2007 financiar los beneficios médicos de l@s jubilad@s. ¿Significa esto que la UAW ahora es dueña de una mayoría de acciones en la compañía con la cual está negociando? ¿Tiene la posibilidad de controlar la corporación ahora que es accionista votante?

No exactamente. La ABVE será dirigida por un administrador quien nombrará a sólo un miembro a la junta directiva de la Nueva Chrysler. Tres miembros serán nombrados por el Tesoro, tres por la Fiat, uno por el gobierno canadiense y otro por el prestamista, todos los cuales tendrán acciones más pequeñas en la compañía que la ABVE. Todas las acciones de la ABVE serán en acciones sin derecho al voto, y a medida que las inversiones de la Fiat crezcan en la Nueva Chrysler, las de la ABVE disminuirán.

Lo que los reportajes no mencionan es que la ABVE era ya en si una gran concesión por parte de l@s trabajadores/as. Lo que motivó a la Chrysler (y también a la Ford y a la General Motors) instalar el fondo fue el deseo de eliminar los “costos de herencia”, la compensación para l@s jubilad@s quienes ya no pueden seguir siendo explotados. Con la ABVE, las compañías tenían que pagar una cantidad pero quedarían libres de futuros gastos de herencia. Fue una gran victoria para las compañías y un juego para la unión. Además, l@s trabajadores/as en las plantas concedieron muchos beneficios como el de la subida en el costo de vida y otras compensaciones para cubrir el costo de la ABVE.

Luego, como una condición para el rescate del año pasado, el Depto. de Hacienda forzó al sindicato aceptar una segunda concesión. La mitad de la ABVE tendría ahora que pagarse en acciones de la compañía. El valor de las acciones puede bajar, poniendo en riesgo los beneficios de salud que l@s jubilad@s habían ganado al trabajar tantos años en las líneas de montaje. La ABVE todavía no está funcionando y ya a l@s jubilad@s les han quitado su seguro dental y de visión.

L@s miembros del sindicato no están recibiendo nada como resultado de este desfavorable arreglo. Han renunciado al pago por días festivos, a los descansos durante el día de trabajo, al pago por horas extra de trabajo, al pago por la subida del costo de vida (COLA por sus siglas en inglés), a las bonificaciones que en un tiempo fueron a su vez una concesión otorgada a la empresa en lugar de los aumentos anuales del salario, a los beneficios para l@s trabajadores/as despedid@s, y otras concesiones más. Éstos fueron logros que sentaron prec-

edente, ganados a través de décadas de lucha, y fueron los primeros en estar en la lista de las enormes concesiones en el contrato original del 2007-2011.

Los cientos de millones de dólares en concesiones representan una transferencia de riqueza de la clase trabajadora a los capitalistas. A l@s trabajadores/as de la industria automotriz se les ha prohibido salir en huelga desde ahora hasta que termine el próximo contrato en septiembre del 2015.

Por todas estas concesiones l@s trabajador@s recibieron la promesa de que la alianza con la Fiat “pudiera resultar en incrementos de producción en las operaciones de montaje y de los trenes de súper velocidad de la compañía” y que no habría “ninguna terminación de pensiones de emplead@s y jubilad@s representad@s por el sindicato UAW”. La primera promesa se descompuso con los anuncios más recientes de los cierres de plantas. La segunda, dirigida a una preocupación legítima, podría probar ser falsa también si la compañía quebrada fuera exonerada por el gobierno de hacer pagos al fondo de pensiones.

En vez de movilizar a l@s miembros ordinari@s para protestar este ultraje cometido contra l@s trabajadores/as, el presidente de la UAW Internacional, Ron Gettelfinger, se ha hecho un aliado de la compañía, la administración de Obama, y de los prestamistas. Se da la apariencia de un frente unido comprometido a la supervivencia de la Chrysler y a que sea “competitiva”, obstaculizado solamente por unos insignificantes fondos de riesgo.

Pero de todos modos Gettelfinger no tiene una voz verdadera. Desde que Ronald Reagan destruyó el sindicato de controladores aéreos, ha habido un esfuerzo implacable para bajar el costo de la fuerza de trabajo que ha resultado en el sufrimiento de l@s trabajadores/as y sus comunidades. La única manera de prevenir más sufrimiento de las masas es con la lucha de masas.

Los trabajadores/as automotrices deberían estar montando protestas masivas contra los despidos, los cierres de plantas y las concesiones. Sus aliad@s naturales, l@s verdader@s accionistas que realmente tienen interés en estos asuntos, son numeros@s.

Trabajan en compañías de partes de automóviles donde cada semana se anuncia otra quiebra. Trabajan en el caucho, el acero, el cristal, los plásticos, en los servicios públicos, construcción, en ventas al menor, servicios de alimentación y en el gobierno — porque lo que pasa en la industria automotriz afecta toda la economía. Viven en comunidades que antes eran vibrantes y que ahora están golpeadas por el desempleo.

Solamente un movimiento amplio de la clase trabajadora puede detener los ataques de la empresa capitalista.

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